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DIRECTORATE OF
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Intelligence Memorandum

Communists Attack Delta Outposts

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
14 June 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

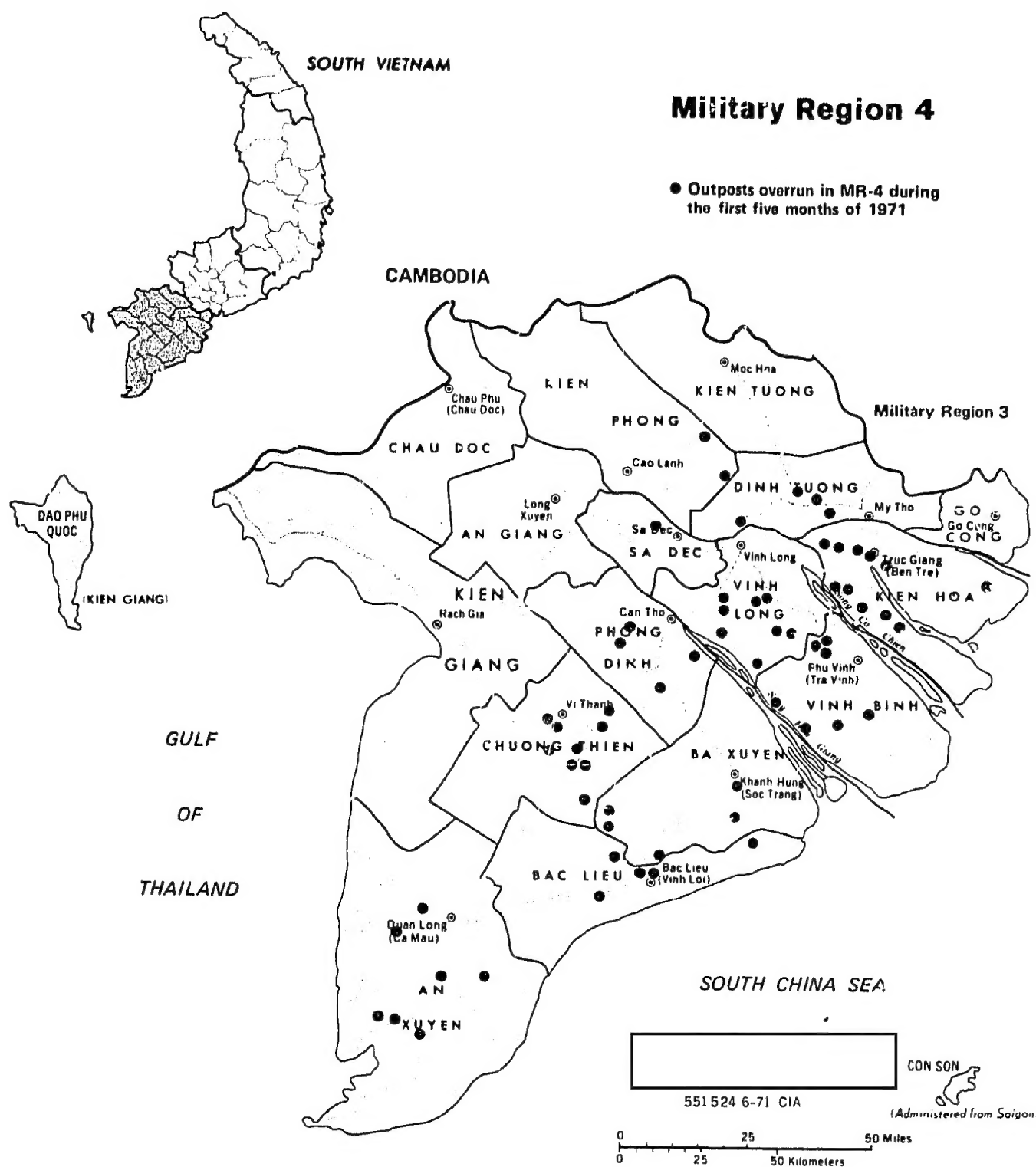
Communists Attack Delta Outposts

Introduction

An important element of the government pacification effort that has been developed in Military Region 4 (MR-4) has been the infusion of military and administrative forces throughout areas traditionally controlled by the Communists. Although their forces in the delta are somewhat weaker this year, the Communists have made a special point of attacking government outposts in recent months, and they have had considerable success, often with the help of sympathizers within the government's ranks.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated within CIA.

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Government Actions and Enemy Reactions

Since late 1968, hundreds of security outposts have been built in MR-4 and manned by the government's territorial security forces (Regional Forces and Popular Forces) and the militia (Peoples Self-Defense Forces). These new outposts have provided a permanent government military presence in previously unprotected areas where the Viet Cong had been virtually unchallenged. As a result, these areas have been opened to pacification, resettlement, and economic and agricultural development. The psychological and other secondary benefits of this outpost expansion are as advantageous to the government as they are detrimental to the already depressed enemy.

Outposts--most of them manned by the Popular Forces--were overrun 63 times in MR-4 during the first five months of this year. (During the same period only six outposts were overrun throughout the rest of the country.) This is double the number overrun during the same period of 1970. Some 50 other MR-4 outposts were attacked by ground assault during the first five months of 1971, but the defending security forces managed to repel the attackers in these actions.

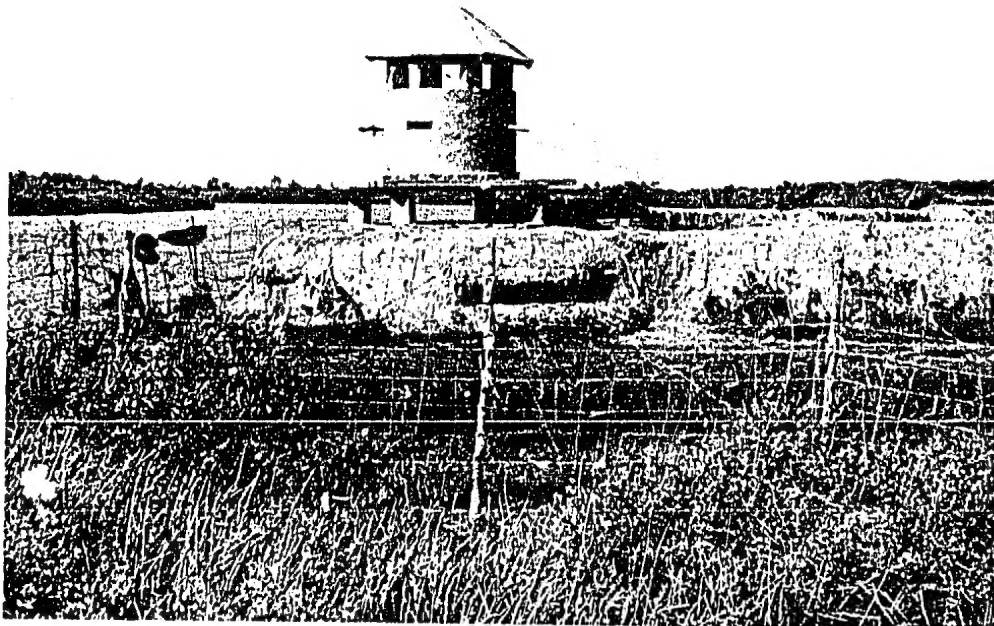
The total number of outposts overrun in MR-4 is little more than one percent of the 4,000 in the delta as a whole, and government casualties were only a tiny fraction of the territorial security forces in MR-4. In the 63 successful enemy attacks, 381 government military personnel were killed, 205 were wounded, and 280 were reported missing (some of whom later returned). The low ratio of wounded to killed reflects the fact that many of the overrun outposts were subverted and that the Viet Cong commando tactics used were especially destructive.

The Communists apparently took relatively light casualties in these operations, while reaping considerable material rewards--816 individual weapons, 10 crew-served weapons, and 78 radios. Although the government will not be set back by the loss of this material, it will be useful to the enemy, especially

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in light of VC supply shortages in the delta. Moreover, the defenders of the outposts paid a high price; an average of six lives and 13 weapons was lost in each assault.

Most of the outposts that fell were overrun by local VC elements rather than by enemy main-force units; local forces took 53 outposts while VC main-force elements have been credited with overrunning but seven. Only three were overrun by NVA units, and two of these fell on one night in An Xuyen Province.



River Outpost

The pre-eminence of local force units in these attacks reflects the nature of today's war in the delta. The combination of ARVN operations in Cambodia and ARVN and Regional Force operations in traditional enemy base areas in MR-4 has contributed to the further reduction in large-unit activity by the enemy. As a result, the enemy is mainly employing

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local forces against selected targets. Outposts are very visible, and successful attacks against them inflict substantial damage on the government's pacification program.

The Communists have attacked most where they are strongest; two thirds of the overrun outposts were located in five provinces with a strong Viet Cong apparatus (Kien Hoa with 11 outposts overrun, Chuong Thien with nine, Vinh Long with eight, An Xuyen with seven, and Vinh Binh with seven). During this five-month period, no outposts were overrun in five of MR-4's 16 provinces where the apparatus is relatively weak.

Government Weaknesses

The enemy's ability to nibble away at the pacification program by attacking, subverting, and overrunning outposts is facilitated by a variety of weaknesses in the ranks of government forces. The most serious of these is the poor quality of the leadership in the PF outposts; this, coupled with the generally inadequate training and motivation of the Popular Forces, produces a lack of confidence. These shortcomings, compounded by apathy and a lack of vigilance, a shortage of assigned personnel even at night, and the sometimes limited knowledge that the Popular Forces have of the local area because of the frequent rotation of their units, are the obvious causes of the vulnerability of the outposts.

In addition to raw firepower, the VC employ a mixture of terror, harassment, espionage, and subversion in their campaign against government outposts. In Vinh Long Province, where eight outposts were overrun during the five months and where several Peoples Self-Defense Force groups defected after being proselyted by the enemy, the VC distributed propaganda leaflets near new outposts warning civilians that they would be killed if they cooperated with the government clearing effort or assisted the troops involved.

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The exposed location of many of the newer outposts in areas long controlled by the enemy and the requirement that all Popular Forces personnel be recruited in the district of their employment increase the vulnerability of these positions. The thousands of individuals swept into the Popular Forces have undoubtedly included numerous Viet Cong sympathizers and draft-dodgers, many of whom provide easy targets for proselytization and later activation as penetration agents.

Twenty-six of the 63 attacks in which outposts were overrun involved treachery or suspected betrayal and there may well have been other instances that have not been reported. Subversion of outpost personnel greatly reduces enemy assault casualties, practically ensures tactical success, and hands the government a psychological as well as a military defeat.

Enemy propagandists and proselyters emphasize the government's inability to protect the local populace near a betrayed outpost. The effect of this often lingers after the overrun outpost has been reoccupied, as was demonstrated in Chuong Thien Province. There, in January, two outposts were abandoned at the mere threat of attack after the VC had overrun or penetrated four other outposts located along the VC commo-liaison route. Some Popular Forces defending an outpost in Kien Hoa Province are reported to be so afraid that they never move outside their perimeter walls.

Enemy propaganda, psychological warfare broadcasts, and booby traps sometimes combine to cause serious morale problems among both the military and the civilian populations. In one district of Phong Dinh Province, two Regional Forces companies constructing outposts were rendered ineffective by heavy casualties caused by booby traps, fear of the enemy, and desertions. In both cases the companies had to be sent back to a rear garrison area for reorganization and refresher training.

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The Broader Effects

These Viet Cong military and psychological successes often indirectly affect a variety of government pacification programs. In one district in Kien Hoa Province where the government allocated military forces and large amounts of money to pacify and reconstruct a town in an area in which two outposts had been overrun, province officials were unable to get civilian contractors even to bid on construction projects because of fear of the enemy.

[REDACTED] the government had already lost much of the potential benefit of the pacification project because of delays in getting it under way.

Although the enemy's focus this year on attacks against outposts is in a sense a symptom of reduced enemy military capabilities in much of the delta, these attacks clearly have had a psychological impact far out of proportion to their tactical achievement, especially in cases involving betrayal. During attacks on the outposts, the enemy has inflicted considerable damage on the government's local position, captured large numbers of weapons and radios, and improved the morale of Communist forces, while sustaining few casualties. The government is able to absorb this kind of enemy pressure without suffering any extensive deterioration in its over-all position in the delta, but the attacks and the uncertainty they create help the enemy increase their margin of mass support and keep the Communists very much in the game.

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